

Chapter 1

Overview of Maine's Suicide and Self-Inflicted Injury Surveillance System

The Maine Youth Suicide Prevention Program (MYSPP) created the State's first comprehensive surveillance system for suicide and self-inflicted injury in 2005 with funding from the Division of Injury Disability Outcomes and Programs within the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDCP). Public health surveillance is broadly defined as the "the ongoing and systematic collection, analysis, interpretation, and dissemination of health data used for planning, implementing, and evaluating public health interventions and programs."¹ Surveillance data provide an overview of the health of a population, describing a health outcome or risk factor according to time, personal characteristics—such as gender and age—and geography. Suicide and self-inflicted injury surveillance data can contribute to a clearer understanding of the burden and scope of self-harm. This information will be used to guide prevention efforts in the State.

The Maine suicide and self-inflicted injury surveillance system is limited to data sources that include data collected over multiple time periods using standardized collection methods. For example, Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) data are collected every other year using many of the same questions. Standardized data collection and analysis of major health indicators ensures comparability of data across time and place. Surveillance does not provide in-depth analysis addressing specific questions. For that reason, it can never replace well-conducted, specialized studies to examine more complicated dynamics of a specific issue in a population.

Suicide is the 10th leading cause of death for Maine residents and the 2nd leading cause for persons aged 15 to 24. The MYSPP focuses prevention efforts on Maine youth aged 10 to 24, though this report also includes data on older age groups. For our analysis, we divided the 10 to 24 year old population into three age groups—10 to 14, 15 to 19, and 20 to 24—while older age groups were examined in broader categories. It is important to note that all analyses were restricted to the population aged 10 years and older. Children under age 10 were excluded because we considered them too young developmentally to have a conceptualization of mortality that is consistent with suicidal behavior, although one could debate the appropriate age cut-off for suicide surveillance. In any event, extremely few suicides or self-inflicted injuries occur in those under age 10.

Data on suicide, self-inflicted injury, and suicide ideation for Maine and, where available, the nation, were gathered from four sources, as shown in Figure 1.a. Death data are from the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) death database through the Center for Disease Control's (CDC) WISQARS website (<http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/wisqars/>). Inpatient hospitalization data were obtained from legislatively-mandated databases maintained by the Maine Health Data Organization (MHDO). Data on self-reported suicide ideation and behavior in youth are from the Maine Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) and, separately, the national YRBS. This report is organized by data type: chapter 2 provides data on suicide rates and causes, chapter 3 summarizes inpatient hospitalizations for self-inflicted injuries, and chapter 4 reports data on self-reported suicide ideation and behavior and self-injuries among youth (YRBS) in Maine and the nation.

¹ Klaucke DN, Thacker SB, Parrish RG, et al. Guidelines for evaluating surveillance systems. MMWR 1998;37:1-18.

Figure 1.a. Databases Used For Maine's Suicide/Self Inflicted Injury Surveillance System

Database	Years	Population	Outcome of Interest
<i>National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) Death Database²</i>	1992-2003 ³	United States residents	Underlying cause of death of suicide Specific cause of injury
<i>Inpatient Hospitalization Data (Discharge)</i>	1998-2004	All Maine residents hospitalized in Maine	Discharge codes for self-inflicted injury Specific cause of injury
<i>Maine Youth Risk Behavior Survey (Maine YRBS⁴)</i>	1995, 1997, 2001, 2003, 2005 ⁵	A state representative sample of students in Maine's publicly-funded middle and high schools	Self-reported depression, suicide ideation, and suicide attempts
<i>National Youth Risk Behavior Survey</i>	1995, 1997, 1999, 2003, 2005	A representative national sample of high school students	Self-reported depression, suicide ideation, and suicide attempts

² National death data obtained from: <http://wonder.cdc.gov/mortSQL.html> and <http://webappa.cdc.gov/sasweb/ncipc/mortrate.html>.

³ National and state death data were only available through 2003 at the time of this report.

⁴ Brener ND, Kann L, Kinchen SA, Grunbaum JA, Whalen L, Eaton D, Hawkins J, Ross JG. Methodology of the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System. MMWR 2004;53 (RR12):1-13.

⁵ The Maine 1999 YRBS did not achieve a 60 percent overall response rate, cannot be considered representative of the state, and was not included in this report.